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ABSTRACT

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent, nonprofit public policy organization founded in 1990 to improve opportunities for children and families in the South with a focus on disadvantaged children. This annual report presents the accomplishments and activities of the organization for 1999. The introductory letter from the president and chairman notes that the major thrust during 1999 was to continue efforts to reduce the number of children lacking health insurance. The report presents information on the progress of the following initiatives: (1) an expansion of the "Covering Kids" health access initiative for low-income uninsured children; (2) the "Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care"; (3) "Supporting Families After Welfare Reform," improving access to Medicaid, state health insurance programs, and food stamps; and (4) a site visit to Mayersville, Mississippi to develop strategies for addressing challenges faced by rural families related to transportation, child care, child health coverage, and health care. The report also includes a list of 1999 publications of the Southern Institute. Plans for the year 2000 are delineated related to improving access to children's health insurance and to child care assistance, supporting families who no longer receive welfare assistance, and pursuing solutions to problems common to small, rural communities. The report concludes with a list of the Institute's board of directors and staff. (KB)

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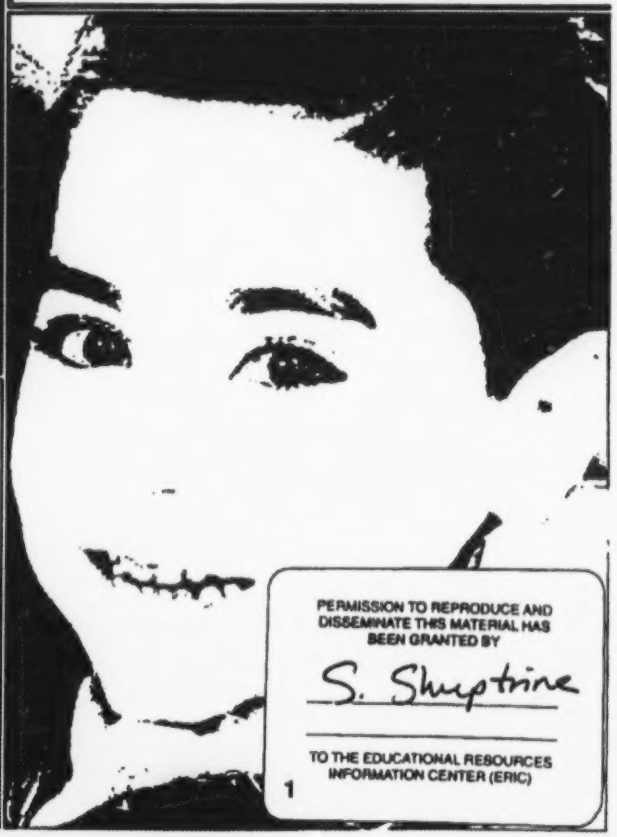
Sarah C. Shuptrine and Kristine Hartvigsen

THE SOUTHERN INSTITUTE on Children and Families

1999 Annual Report



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Southern Institute on Children and Families

The Southern Institute on Children and Families is an independent, non-profit public policy organization founded in 1990. It endeavors to improve opportunities for children and families in the South with a focus on disadvantaged children. Through special projects and surveys, the Southern Institute on Children and Families spotlights health, social and economic issues of regional significance. It works to encourage public/private-sector collaboration on behalf of children and families and seeks to remove bureaucratic and other barriers that restrict access to needed services. The Southern Institute on Children and Families is funded through grants and contributions.

The focus of the Southern Institute on Children and Families includes:

Alabama
Arkansas
Delaware
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
North Carolina
Oklahoma
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Virginia
West Virginia

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Letter from the Chairman and the President

As the Southern Institute on Children and Families enters its 10th year and moves ahead into the 21st century, we are on target with our mission and are well-placed to continue our regional and national leadership on behalf of children and families. We are grateful for the support and recognition we have received as we worked to fulfill our mission.

Our major thrust during 1999 has been the continuation of efforts to reduce the number of uninsured children. The ***Covering Kids*** initiative, sponsored by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and directed by the Southern Institute, has made solid progress in the past year. The unprecedented attention to reducing the numbers of uninsured children is good news for our nation, and ***Covering Kids*** projects have made a significant contribution toward outreach, simplification and coordination of health care coverage programs for children. Although progress has been made, we must double our efforts to inform families that child health coverage is available through Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). We also must press on with efforts to coordinate among health coverage programs in states that administer them separately and to continue our thrust on making the application and redetermination processes less burdensome for families. It's a broken record for us, but we plan to stay with it until the job is done.

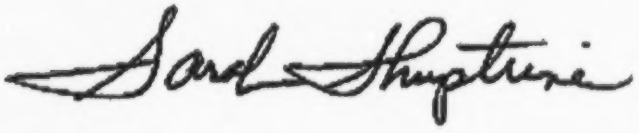
In late 1999, the Southern Institute was delighted to learn that it had been awarded a grant from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation to lead the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care, beginning in 2000. In our 1998 Annual Report, we listed the expansion of our work on child care assistance issues as a major goal. This grant solidifies progress toward that goal. We are eager to begin our collaborative work with the southern states to improve access to child care assistance.

We also were pleased that in late 1999, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation asked the Southern Institute to serve as the National Program Office for a new national program, titled ***Supporting Families After Welfare Reform: Access to Medicaid, SCHIP and Food Stamps.*** The objectives of ***Covering Kids*** are closely related to those of ***Supporting Families,*** and this additional opportunity to help children and families at a time when they need responsive, supportive programs is another step forward.

In 1999, the Southern Institute experienced significant growth. Expansion of ***Covering Kids*** and the addition of new programs necessitated more staff and a move to larger offices. In November, the Southern Institute moved to our new location on Hampton Street in downtown Columbia, South Carolina.

We want to recognize the contributions of the Southern Institute staff in the accomplishments made on behalf of children and families. Their dedication and hard work have made all things possible!

This report will take you through more details of the new projects and will outline the progress of the ***Covering Kids*** initiative. We are delighted at the developments in 1999 and look forward to more progress in 2000.



Sarah C. Shuptrine
President and Chief Executive Officer

Unita Blackwell
Chairman

Covering Kids

With the new year of 1999 came the implementation of a planned expansion of ***Covering Kids: A National Health Access Initiative for Low-Income Uninsured Children*** from a program originally conceived and designed for 15 states to an initiative encompassing 50 statewide grantees (49 states and the District of Columbia) with 167 local pilot project sites across the country.

As the ***Covering Kids*** National Program Office (NPO), the Southern Institute planned and executed all site visits, coordinated proposal review and provided staff for the ***Covering Kids*** National Advisory Committee as it developed its recommendations to The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Southern Institute also conducted Grantee Training Sessions in Phoenix and Chicago. Participants received the latest information on simplification issues, collecting and analyzing eligibility outcomes data, promoting the enrollment of children moving in and out of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) system, conducting outreach through community organizations and developing social marketing messages.

In September 1999, ***Covering Kids*** convened its first Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, with more than 320 in attendance. Grantees enjoyed an inspiring address by Steven Schroeder, President of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who applauded

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their energy and "can-do spirit." The meeting offered grantees the opportunity to network with one another and to engage in dialogue with an impressive array of panelists from national government and advocacy organizations. In response to grantee input, sessions also addressed evaluation issues and partnering with local eligibility agencies. A series of 21 intensified breakout discussions examined a wide range of issues and concerns related to the ***Covering Kids*** primary objectives of outreach, simplification and coordination. Audiotapes from key presentations were disseminated to all participants.

A highlight of the Annual Meeting was the debut of a five-minute ***Covering Kids*** informational video produced by the communications firm of Greer, Margolis, Mitchell, Burns & Associates. The video features interviews with members of three families whose children are enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP and what that coverage has meant to them. The video's enrollment message is strengthened by national statistics, as well as on-camera supporting comments from a pediatrician, an elementary school principal, an employer and a school nurse. All grantees received copies of the video, and hundreds of video orders from outside organizations were filled.

In September 1999, *Covering Kids* convened its first Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, with more than 320 in attendance.

In the fall of 1999, ***Covering Kids*** grantees rose to the occasion when they were asked to help support the national ***Insure Kids Now Through Schools*** campaign by serving as resources in their communities. Under the leadership of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, the campaign was a multi-agency effort, bringing together the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, among others, as partners in an unprecedented back-to-school child health coverage outreach effort.

Covering Kids implemented a well-timed boost to the back-to-school effort in October by launching a satellite news feed to major television markets in Arizona, California, Georgia, Iowa and Texas. The news feed provided drop-in interviews that TV stations could use to fortify and bolster local stories on child health coverage. Offerings included interviews with Secretary Riley, ***Covering Kids*** Director Sarah Shuptrine, American Academy of Pediatrics Past President Joel Alpert, and a family whose children are enrolled

in coverage programs. An additional Spanish-language news feed was offered to Spanish-language outlets.

Twice during 1999, the Southern Institute on Children and Families assembled a select group of national organization representatives to discuss strategies for child health coverage outreach. The group is known as the ***Covering Kids*** National Communications and Marketing Strategies Group. A questionnaire disseminated to the group resulted in a compilation of national organization strategies being implemented in the areas of outreach, simplification and coordination. Results of the survey were posted on the ***Covering Kids*** website in May 1999.

The ***Covering Kids*** website at **http://www.coveringkids.org** continues to serve as an internet destination for statewide and local ***Covering Kids*** coalition members, outreach workers, health policy researchers, academics, policymakers and journalists seeking information on child health coverage issues. The site includes a reciprocal link to the Southern Institute's website at **http://www.kidsouth.org**.

Throughout 1999, the Southern Institute provided and contracted for technical assistance needed by ***Covering Kids*** grantees to assure that they were able to tackle the complicated issues surrounding simplification, develop effective outreach messages and strategies, and work toward coordination across Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in states where they are administered separately.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care

Affordability of child care is a major public policy issue that affects both low and middle income families in the southern region. The push to move families from welfare to work added urgency to the need to help families who are unable to pay for child care on their earnings alone. Research by the Southern Institute on Children and Families and other organizations has shown that the availability of child care assistance is a significant factor in the ability of families to avoid welfare.

In late 1999, the Southern Institute on Children and Families received a grant from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation to lead the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care. The initiative will begin in January 2000 and run through December 2000.

As part of the program, a Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care, comprised of representatives from the southern states and the District of Columbia, will lead development of an Action Plan outlining specific steps to improve access to child care assistance for low and middle income families. Governors of 17 southern states and the mayor of the District of Columbia will be invited to name representatives to the Task Force.

The Southern Institute on Children and Families report, titled ***Southern Regional Initiative to Improve Access to Benefits for Low Income Families With Children***, (published in February 1998) included a chapter on child care and set forth the following action steps for consideration by southern states:

Δ To assist more low-income families with the high cost of child care and to discourage welfare as an entry point for child care assistance, states should identify and implement actions to achieve an income based system of child care subsidies for low-income working families with no requirement that a family be on welfare for any period of time in order to obtain assistance in paying for child care.

Δ To avoid denying child care assistance to income eligible families who have resources that exceed state asset limits, states should exempt assets when determining eligibility for child care assistance.

Δ To assure that the application and recertification process is not burdensome for low-income families seeking child care assistance, states

should review eligibility policies and procedures, including recertification periods and verification requirements.

Δ In order to provide continuity of child care assistance, states should review policies regarding agency initiative in making category changes for low-income families whose children remain eligible.

Δ To assure that families know about available child care assistance, states and communities should design and implement outreach strategies to communicate the availability of child care assistance for low-income working families.

Affordability of child care is a major public policy issue that affects both low and middle income families in the southern region. The push to move families from welfare to work added urgency to the need to help families who are unable to pay for child care on their earnings alone.

Δ To foster cooperation with Head Start, states should identify and disseminate information on successful Head Start collaboration strategies and document issues that need to be addressed at the federal level.

These and other issues will be reviewed by the Task Force in the development of the Action Plan due to be completed in the fall of 2000. The Action Plan will be widely disseminated and promoted across the southern region.

Information on the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care can be found on the Southern Institute website located at **http://www.kidsouth.org/childcare.html**.

Supporting Families After Welfare Reform

Concerns over policies and systems issues resulting in declines in Medicaid and Food Stamp enrollment developed into a decision by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support a new competitive grant program to be implemented in 2000. ***Supporting Families After Welfare Reform: Access to Medicaid, SCHIP and Food Stamps*** is a joint initiative of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the United States Department of Agriculture. The Southern Institute on Children and Families was pleased once again to be asked to serve as the National Program Office (NPO) for the newly created program.

Recent declines in Medicaid and Food Stamp enrollment of adults and children are believed to be, at least in part, due to welfare policy changes. While reducing dependence on government benefits is a goal of welfare reform, a parallel goal is helping parents sustain their ability to provide for their families. Participation in the Medicaid and Food Stamp programs can help support families while they make the transition toward self-sufficiency.

Recent declines in Medicaid and Food Stamp enrollment of adults and children are believed to be, at least in part, due to welfare policy changes. While reducing dependence on government benefits is a goal of welfare reform, a parallel goal is helping parents sustain their ability to provide for their families.

The purpose of ***Supporting Families After Welfare Reform*** is to help up to 22 states or large counties solve problems in eligibility processes that make it difficult for low-income families to access and retain Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) or Food Stamps, particularly families moving from welfare to work. The program includes:

Δ Technical assistance for states and counties developing and using eligibility and enrollment data to improve their systems;

Δ Workshops for states and counties on the barriers in state and local eligibility and enrollment processes;

Δ Tailored technical assistance to help states diagnose where opportunities for significant improvements exist in their eligibility process and to develop plans of action; and

Δ Resources to states and counties to implement proposed solutions.

Two kinds of grants will be awarded in the ***Supporting Families After Welfare Reform*** program. Diagnosis grants will help projects extract performance reports from state/county eligibility information systems and identify key measures of effectiveness in enrolling and retaining families. Implementation grants will help projects implement strong plans to solve enrollment problems.

Mayersville, Mississippi: Facilitating Action in a Rural Community

Children and families in economically depressed rural communities should be a top priority for policymakers who feel strongly that every child should have an opportunity to succeed in life. The traditional approach to building the capacity of such communities has been to attempt to attract jobs. Especially now, as welfare reform dries up a source of income for many families in economically depressed rural communities, the provision of child care and transportation are two key factors in building the capacity of parents to get and keep jobs. The Southern Institute is concerned that the jobs approach does not materialize in many of these communities and alternative strategies are not being fully explored.

At the invitation of Unita Blackwell, Mayor of Mayersville, Mississippi, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Southern Institute on Children and Families, the Southern Institute in June 1999 continued a journey begun in the fall of 1998 to learn more about the challenges rural families face when distances are far and resources are limited. Mayersville, a town of 500 residents in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, is in one of the state's poorest counties. The Southern Institute visits to Mayersville were made possible by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The purpose of the June 1999 site visit to Mayersville was to address problems identified during the initial 1998 site visit and attempt to develop strategies to resolve those problems. The follow-up meeting attended by local, state and federal officials produced a list of actions needed, as well as pathways for the actions. Federal officials pledged their assistance, and community representatives developed follow-up plans. State human services officials at a second meeting in the capitol city of Jackson expressed a willingness to work on the issues in cooperation with local citizens.

A full report on the Mayersville meetings is on the Southern Institute's website at **http://www.kidsouth.org/reports-Mayersville99.html**. Hard copies of the report, titled ***Mayersville, Mississippi: A Study on Improving Access to Benefits and Services for Low-Income Families in the Rural South,*** can be ordered from the Southern Institute by calling 803-779-2607. A summary of issues discussed and actions taken is provided below.

Transportation: While the need for basic public transportation services in Mayersville was apparent, there was an absence of hard data to document the need. The lack of data had resulted in a failure to justify a Department of Transportation (DOT) grant funding public transportation services for Mayersville citizens to get to and from their jobs. Lack of transportation is a longstanding problem in Mayersville and many other rural communities. Providing transportation assistance requires multiple strategies, including fostering ownership of personal automobiles, improving coordination in human service transportation, and developing responsive public transportation systems to serve rural areas.

Several strategies were discussed and led to an agreement to try again to produce the data required by DOT. Additionally, the discussion spotlighted the problems created by the Food Stamp asset/resource rules that keep families from owning a reliable automobile. Research into the asset limits indicated that an automobile can be exempted from the Food Stamp asset test under certain circumstances, but not when it is used for a "daily commute" to a job. The Southern Institute report pointed out that considering the real-life circumstances of before-dawn and after-dark long-distance rural travel required to get to and from work, the Food Stamp limit of $4,650 is an unrealistically low automobile value given the need for reliable commuter transportation. (See "Food Stamp Asset Test," inset box.)

Food Stamp Asset Test

The allowed value of the Food Stamp automobile is $4,650 fair market value. Any amount above that is counted against a $2,000 resource limit for families where no person is age 60 or older.

Under a new United States Department of Agriculture rule, TANF-funded benefits or benefits funded under Maintenance of Effort can confer an exemption from Food Stamp automobile asset rules. States are given broad discretion to decide which benefits would confer an exemption from the Food Stamp automobile asset test. The benefit would not need to be identified as a TANF benefit.

Meeting participants agreed that public policies such as the Food Stamp asset test should be reviewed to identify actions needed to better support working families. At the Jackson meeting, state officials indicated their willingness to look into ways to address this issue with federal officials.

Child Care: Lack of child care for working families is a major problem in Mayersville. In June 1999, Mayersville's Head Start Center provided limited, part-time operating hours. Extending the Center's operating hours would

require additional funding and resources. A tour of the Center's unused classrooms brought hope that they could be utilized for extended day care.

The Mayersville meeting concluded with official commitment to begin negotiating for additional funding and extended operating hours for the Center. In addition, officials said they would explore family day care opportunities and interview individuals interested in providing child care in their homes.

Within months after the Southern Institute site visit, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provided a $40,000 grant to renovate and open two unused classrooms in the Mayersville Head Start Center to be used for community child care needs. Head Start also agreed to provide transportation services to families placing children in the two additional classrooms. In addition, ACF secured a commitment from the Mississippi Department of Human Services to provide child care training to interested parties in Mayersville. The newly trained labor pool is to be used to staff the newly opened classrooms. Plans were to have state child care vouchers subsidize the cost of providing the care.

Within months after the Southern Institute site visit, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provided a $40,000 grant to renovate and open two unused classrooms in the Mayersville Head Start Center to be used for community child care needs.

Child Health Coverage: Meeting participants discussed a state policy whereby Mississippi children whose parents are sanctioned under the TANF program are allowed only two months to reapply for Medicaid before their cases are automatically closed. It is likely that most children in sanctioned families remain eligible under the poverty-related Medicaid coverage group for children. The Mississippi Covering Kids Initiative, a collaborative group that includes the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Medicaid Division, indicated they would continue to work on determining what actions can be taken to ensure that children who are Medicaid-eligible maintain coverage.

Health Care: A wide-ranging discussion of the need for improved access to primary and preventive health care for children and adults in Mayersville continued to come back to lack of transportation as a major issue. Mayersville does not have a health facility in the community, so sick or injured citizens must be transported to provider facilities in Vicksburg or Rolling Fork or Greenville. Distances severely limit opportunities to access prevention and primary care. Representatives from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the University of Mississippi Medical Center and the DeltaCare Rural Health Center agreed to hold discussions to develop strategies to address the need for a coordinated health services system to serve the health needs of Mayersville families.

Technical Assistance Needed

The experience of the Southern Institute in Mayersville indicates that a team approach to technical assistance is required if rural communities with limited resources are to make sense of and access the services and benefits greatly needed by their citizens. The expertise of state agencies, federal agencies and non-profit organizations is available, but there is no systematic approach to bringing them together to apply their "know-how" to the development of comprehensive strategies. Government and non-profit organizations working together toward the same goals can be a powerful force in achieving quality-of-life improvements in any setting, but it is particularly essential in attempting to help isolated rural communities like Mayersville.

Through this initiative, public and private organizations were able to look across agency lines and focus on the contribution each could make. The facilitative role played by the Southern Institute in Mayersville can be replicated and improved upon in other rural communities. The convening and facilitation of a coordinated approach led to the development of action steps long needed but unrealized. As a result, it is highly likely that benefits and services needed to improve opportunities for low-income children will become more available and accessible.

1999 Publications

The Southern Institute published and disseminated nine reports during 1999, both in physical form and electronically on its website located at **http://www.kidsouth.org/reports.html**.

Δ ***Simplification: The Make or Break Issue for Achieving Full Enrollment of Eligible, Uninsured Children***, prepared by Sarah C. Shuptrine and Vicki C. Grant, PhD, MSW, ***Covering Kids*** National Program Office, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***Guidelines for Collecting, Analyzing and Displaying Child Health Coverage Eligibility Outcomes Data***, prepared by Vicki C. Grant, PhD, MSW, ***Covering Kids*** National Program Office, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***The Ins and Outs of Delinking: Promoting Medicaid Enrollment of Children Who Are Moving In and Out of the TANF System***, prepared for ***Covering Kids*** by Cindy Mann of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***Community-Based Organizations: Paving the Way to Children's Health Insurance Coverage***, prepared for ***Covering Kids*** by Donna Cohen Ross of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***Developing Social Marketing Messages for Covering Kids***, prepared for ***Covering Kids*** by Sharyn M. Sutton, PhD, of Sutton Social Marketing/LLC, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***Electronic Communications: Where Websites Fit In***, prepared by Kristine Hartvigsen, ***Covering Kids*** National Program Office, Southern Institute on Children and Families, March 1999.

Δ ***Mayersville, Mississippi: A Study on Improving Access to Benefits and Services for Low-Income Families in the Rural South***, prepared by Sarah C. Shuptrine, Southern Institute on Children and Families, June 1999.

Δ ***Monitoring and Evaluation of Outreach Strategies for Low-Income Children and Their Families***, prepared for ***Covering Kids*** by Elizabeth Shenkman, PhD, Donna Hope Wegener, MA, and Heather Steingraber, MA, of the Institute for Child Health Policy, Southern Institute on Children and Families, October 1999.

Δ ***Assuring That Child Health Applications Do Not Deter Enrollment Among Eligible Children in Non-Citizen Families***, prepared for ***Covering Kids*** by Michelle Cochran and Cindy Mann of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Southern Institute on Children and Families, December 1999.

Looking Ahead

As it approaches its 10th year, the Southern Institute on Children and Families will continue the momentum it has built to fortify lower-income families with the information they need to better meet basic needs.

Covering Kids: The year 2000 marks the make-or-break middle phase of the ***Covering Kids*** initiative and the peak opportunity to reap child health coverage enrollment results. ***Covering Kids*** also will continue to provide timely technical assistance, both electronically via its website, phone and listserv, and in the form of planned regional and national meetings, educational conferences and other grantee networking opportunities. In the coming year, the ***Covering Kids*** National Program Office (NPO), with continuing support from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, will begin an extensive national communications initiative that will bolster the outreach efforts of local grantees and projects across the country.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: In January 2000, the Southern Institute will launch The David and Lucile Packard Foundation funded Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care. A distinguished and knowledgeable task force will provide leadership in molding an Action Plan for advancing policies that increase access to child care assistance, primarily public subsidies. The Action Plan will be disseminated throughout the southern region.

Supporting Families: During the coming year, the ***Supporting Families*** NPO will solicit and receive proposals, convene the ***Supporting Families*** National Advisory Committee to review the proposals and assist The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in making award decisions. Once awards are announced, the NPO will begin establishing a program technical support infrastructure to sustain projects through completion.

Mayersville, Mississippi: The Southern Institute will continue to pursue solutions to access problems common to small, rural communities like Mayersville. The Southern Institute will look back at developments in Mayersville and will offer assistance in resolving issues. The Mayersville experience will be studied for potential replication.

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